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SUBJECT: FRANCE'S MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN THE LYON CONSULAR DISTRICT  
- SOCIALISTS MAINTAIN CONTROL OF BIG CITIES

NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION

REF: Embassy Paris SIPRnet Paris Points for March 18 and previous

Summary

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¶1. (SBU) In the March 9 and 16 municipal elections (ref), the left maintained control of the major cities in the Lyon consular district: Lyon, Dijon, Grenoble, and Clermont Ferrand. The winning incumbents in these cities are business-friendly moderates who retained public support because of their reputations as good municipal managers. Lyon Socialist incumbent Mayor Gerard Collomb declared victory after the first round, with 53 percent of the vote. No mayor in Lyon has ever won in the first round. Dijon Socialist Mayor Francois Rebsamen (PS) was reelected with 56 percent of the votes in the first round, in a city that traditionally opted for the right. In one of the most closely watched elections in the Rhone-Alpes Region, in the city of St. Etienne, Socialist Party candidate Maurice Vincent defeated UMP Mayor Michel Thiolliere, despite Thiolliere's having been named a finalist in the "World Mayor" contest of 2006. Overall, these municipal elections have been a referendum on the effectiveness of incumbent mayors. However, disenchantment with the national government affected the outcome of some races, possibly boosting the margin of victory for the Socialists in the larger cities. End summary.

Lyon - Two business friendly moderates

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¶3. (SBU) Lyon Socialist Mayor Gerard Collomb declared victory after the first round, with 53 percent of the vote. Although observers expected a Collomb victory, the extent of support for him surprised the pundits. No mayor in Lyon has ever won in the first round. Collomb's list won 7 districts out of 9, with the two more well-healed second and sixth districts opting for the lists from the right by 58 percent and 53 percent respectively. Collomb was also elected to preside over the representative association of the greater Lyon Metropolitan area, a conglomeration 57 cities that has a greater budget and resources than the city of Lyon itself.

¶4. (U) Lyon's shift to the left was decisive. Support for the right decreased by about 20 percent since the last municipal election. Collomb headed the list in the ninth district, winning 63 percent of the vote in the first round. Union for Popular Movement (UMP) candidate and former Justice Minister and Transportation Minister Dominique Perben, however, lost by a significant margin in the first round in the third district where he headed the list. His competitor, Socialist District Mayor Thierry Philip, won 53 percent of the vote, against 30 percent for Perben. In the fifth district, Rhone Department UMP Secretary General Michael Havard lost decisively, winning only 43 percent of the votes in the first round, against 53 percent for Socialist incumbent Alexandrine Pesson. Perben has ceded the role of head of the opposition in Lyon's

Municipal Council to Havard.

15. (SBU) Both Collomb and his UMP challenger Perben are business friendly centrists. This similarity was Perben's main problem in challenging Collomb: he failed to differentiate himself sufficiently. Collomb became mayor in 2001, when Union for French Democracy (UDF) incumbent and former Prime Minister Raymond Barre decided not to run. Collomb has been active in devising and funding community organizations and has implemented programs such as a successful scheme to rent bicycles as a way of cutting down inner city traffic (such bicycle rental systems have since been adopted in Paris and Marseille). Perben charged that Collomb pinched most of these ideas from Barre and has lacked vision in several other projects, such as in the construction of a new downtown area where Lyon's two rivers merge. Whether true or not, Collomb has successfully implemented his ideas, and Perben's charges did not resonate with voters.

#### Cantonal Election Results in Lyon's Rhone Department

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6 (U) The right was able to maintain its control of the Departmental Council of the Rhone Department, which surrounds Lyon. Of the 54 cantonal representatives on the council, 22 are from the Socialist and Green parties (up from 20), 13 are from the Union for Popular Movement (UMP) party (up from 11), and three remain from the Communist Party; 16 are from the - now dissolved -- Union for French Democracy (UDF) and its allied center-right Radical Party (down from 20).

#### Other Areas in the Lyon Consular District - Incumbents Stay Put

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17. (U) The Socialists, however, made gains in control over the Departmental Councils in the other departments in the region. Before the election, the right held the majority in 10 of the 16

Departmental Councils in the three regions of the Consular District (Auvergne, Rhone Alps and Burgundy). However, two of the Departmental Councils shifted to the left, with the Communist Party gaining control of the Allier Department in Auvergne and the Socialists winning the Ain Department in Rhone-Alpes.

18. In one of the most closely watched municipal elections in the Rhone-Alpes Region, Socialist Party candidate Maurice Vincent defeated St. Etienne UMP Mayor Michel Thiollie, despite his being named a finalist in the "World Mayor" contest of 2006. Most pundits blame competition from Tholliere's former assistant and candidate of the Democratic Movement (MoDem) party Gilles Artigues for Thiollie's very narrow loss. The left made inroads into some other smaller towns in the region. For instance, in right-leaning Valence, Socialist competitor Alain Maurice defeated UMP candidate Patrick Labaune. The UMP controls city hall, although Labaune was not the sitting Mayor. The left, however, maintained control of the larger cities including Grenoble, Clermont-Ferrand, and Villeurbanne. This trend confirmed the first round results, in which the Socialists maintained control of Lyon, Dijon and Chambery and won control of Chalon-sur-Saone. The sole city that bucked the trend was Puy-en-Velay in which Government Spokesman and UMP candidate Laurent Wauquiez (56.5 percent of the votes) successfully challenged incumbent Socialist Mayor Arlette Arnaud-Landau (40.34 percent). Wauquiez, who was serving as government spokesperson in the government of Prime Minister Francois Fillon, was named to the post of State Secretary for Employment on March 18 immediately following the election.

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